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February 6, 1996

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Reed Hundt, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW, Room 222  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Mr. Hundt:

I am a writer and editor of health information publications and teaching tools for teachers and parents. I have listened to you on Jim Lehrer's program and am a great admirer of your support for educational television. Now I write to you through Molly Ivins' urging (*Detroit Free Press*: Friday, February 2, 1996; Give kids TV programs with worthwhile lessons).

The schools in this country are spending millions of tax payer dollars to mount anti-violence, problem-solving, and decision-making programs. Violence on TV is now a public health issue! I am currently writing a curriculum with six lessons for parents of 6-8 graders, and am also writing multiple essays for parents of high school students (commissioned by intermediate school districts). Each of these publications will give a great deal of attention to warning parents about *controlling* TV viewing. Imagine, having to *control* a medium that, if handled well, could teach and inspire compassion, love, and high moral standards. Television could be used as a powerful teaching tool that would help kids understand our culture and the new peoples who are coming to our nation. I do not want to underestimate how important it is to get kids ready for school, but I do want TV that will teach all children and adolescents.

Positive programming needs to be available, especially for adolescents. I am sure you have the latest Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report, *Great Transitions: Preparing for a New Century*. This report is very sobering.

I do not believe we can leave all this important work of educating children to public broadcasting and the schools. All of us need to be responsible for the next generation. As it stands, we sure aren't doing very well with the current group of children and adolescents.

We are counting on you to hold the line, Mr. Hundt. It is not children who are violent, uncaring, unloving, or undisciplined—it is the adults who are their caretakers—and, unfortunately, the ever-influential TV industry.

Sincerely,

Alice R. McCarthy, Ph.D.  
President

ARMC:mlr

Enclosure

cc: Molly Ivins, Columnist: *Creators Syndicate*, Los Angeles  
Agnes Scott, Vice President: *WTVS Channel 56*, Detroit

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P.S. The Cadillac ad is pretty stupid. More control is *not* what we teach children in comprehensive health education programs.

# Give kids TV programs with worthwhile lessons



We live in a nation that has just sentenced a 12-year-old boy, less than 5 feet tall with an IQ of less than 60, to a maximum-security juvenile facility. It is not a proud day. No matter what your view on either the necessity or the appropriateness of this measure, we can all agree that this child was failed by his parents, teachers, social workers and society.

No simple answers. But more and more experts are saying that television has replaced the family as the single strongest influence in a large number of children's lives. Many come from single-parent families, and while their sole parent is away working, they are left for hours on end with only



"the box" for company.

And the box's single strongest message is: Acquire, acquire, acquire — things to make you fast, things to make you strong. Things will make you attractive, things will bring you friends, things will make you happy, things will give you control, things will bring you love, things will make you successful.

Now look at what happens in Washington when the good guys try to set aside a smidge, just a tiny smidge, of time on television to educate children. Heaven knows it's certainly farcical enough, but it's not funny.

Westinghouse Electric Corp., which is taking over CBS, announced that it is voluntarily increasing educational programming from one hour a week to two hours in 1996 and three hours in 1997. And did our solons applaud this magnificent gesture? They did not.

"Blackmail!" cried the Republicans. "Outrage!"

Poor, pitiful Westinghouse was having its tiny corporate arm twisted out of its tiny corporate socket by the likes of the Center for Media Education, a nonprofit group that tries to bring children's needs into the telecommunications debate.

The Center for Media Education is, of course, a flea compared to Westinghouse's elephant, but Sen. Larry Pressler, R-S.D., chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, and Rep. Jack Fields, R-Texas, chairman of the House subcommittee on telecommunications (and No. 1 recipient of money from telecom political action committees) claimed that forcing CBS to show three hours of educational programming a week is "legalized extortion."

You see, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Reed Hundt, a Clinton appointee, is well-known for supporting educational programming for children. It's shocking, I know, but these things do happen.

Westinghouse needs a few waivers from the FCC to take over some CBS stations. Ergo, the Republicans believe that CBS caved in on children's programming to get the waivers, and they found this so obnoxious that they demanded an investigation of the Center for Media Education.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., sponsor of the Children's Television Act of 1990, told the New York Times: "How mangled have the morals of this town become when only special interests seeking profits are allowed to participate in the license renewal and transfer process?"

You'll be happy to learn what has become of the aforementioned Children's Television Act. When it was passed, stations claimed they were providing an average of 3.4 hours of educational television a week — but that included such thought-starters as "G.I. Joe" and "The Jetsons."

According to a new study out of the University of California at Santa Barbara, stations still claim they provide 3.4 hours of educational TV a week, but that includes "America's Funniest Home Videos," "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" and "Yogi Bear." Oh well ... he's smarter than your average bear.

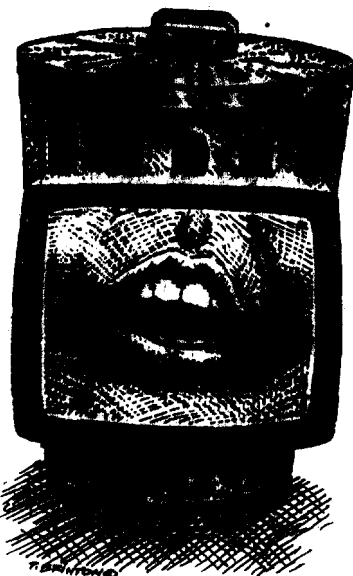
The study also shows that most stations provide only 2.1 hours of educational programming, while most kids watch more than 20 hours of television a week. The problem, of course, is that good educational programming is expensive to produce

and is not commercial — that's why "Sesame Street" is on PBS. In addition, the TV industry provides lower budgets to what they call FCC-friendly or compliance programs and runs them at 5 or 5:30 in the morning.

If you've ever observed a kid watching a "Sesame Street" alphabet segment suddenly crow "E!" in response to some goofy song, you know what "learning-ready" means. That delighted, high-pitched "E!" is easier to take than the sight of a 3-year-old, thumb in mouth, huddled under a snugly blanket, watching a rape scene in a gang-banger movie.

Television is now running an ad that tells you buying a Cadillac will give you more control. Actually, sending a letter to the FCC supporting more and better children's programming will give us all a lot more control than that Cadillac.

Letters can be sent to FCC, Office of the Secretary, Room 222, 1919 M St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20554.



TIM BRINTON/Special to the Free Press

## How to write today's columnists:

**Jeff Greenfield**  
Universal Press Syndicate  
4900 Main St.  
Kansas City, Mo. 64112

**Molly Ivins**  
Creators Syndicate  
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Suite 700  
Los Angeles, Calif. 90045

**Claude Lewis**  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
400 North Broad St.  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19130

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Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20554  
Sirs:

3480 North Main St.  
Holley, NY 14470  
February 5, 1996

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As television is the first teacher of us all nowadays (God help us!), I am writing to protest the miserable performance of most TV stations in the area of children's programming.

Stations claim to provide 3.4 hours of educational television but include such shows as "The Jetsons" and "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" under that rubric. How poverty stricken is their concept of education for children?

Since this ignorance, or perhaps it's merely lack of good will, appears to prevail, might an agency such as yours exert some influence upon them? Don't tell me children are exercising a right to watch at will any more than they exercise a right to a steady diet of enervating poison. Their parents are often not around to exercise theirs.

Please provide enlightened leadership.

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Sincerely,

Beverly M. Wilken